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The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Letter dated 5 January 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward herewith the statement of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, in connection with the Israeli aggression against Gaza (see annex).

I would appreciate it if the present letter and its annex were issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 15 and 16, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nassir Abdulaziz **Al-Nasser**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the Letter dated 5 January 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Arabic]

Speech of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, to the Arab Umma regarding the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip

Sunday, 4 January 2009 — Doha

O citizens of the Arab Nation,

O Arabs in Palestine,

O steadfast people of the Gaza Strip,

May the Peace and the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you.

In recent days, our noble people in the Gaza Strip has been subjected to a vicious aggression that does not discriminate among children, women and the elderly or between civilian and combatant. How can a plane that is bombing a camp teeming with tens of thousands of people distinguish among its victims? War launched with such weapons against such targets is nothing but a war crime as defined by international agreements, laws and norms.

Even without the other problems related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem, the horrors besetting the Gaza Strip today would make it incumbent on Arabs to call out to each other and to call on their leaders for action.

Every Arab boy and girl knows that the Gaza Strip has been suffering under three years of an oppressive blockade, extending even to food and medicine, for no other reason than that the Palestinian people has taken democracy seriously and made its own choices. We all know that Israel remains an occupying force in the West Bank and Gaza even after its unilateral withdrawal from the Strip, and that the "state of calm" has not stopped Israel from going ahead with assassinations and incursions and imposing its suffocating blockade on the Strip.

The blockade turned Gaza into a concentration camp. When that failed to break the will of the Palestinian people, along came the current military attack. This attack must stop. A ceasefire that stops the bloodshed, under terms that put an end to the blockade, must be agreed. The blockade is illegal and inhumane. Any attempt to justify or support it is illegal and immoral. How can support for an illegal blockade be justified legally?

As our defenceless people in the Gaza Strip face this aggression, they are writing a heroic chapter in the history of the Arab Nation with their blood. The horror of what is happening, the sheer scale of the oppression and the heinousness of the crime being committed all require us to act. And as we act, we must be aware that the blood of the martyrs is a sacred trust for us all because it has been spilt in defence of the homeland and in opposition to the blockade.

Qatar has chosen the path of a just peace and has paid a price for that choice in allegations and accusations. But we desire a just peace because it is in the interests of all parties, not just the Arabs. Such a peace would not be consistent with continuing settlement activity, the judaization of Jerusalem, the blockade, and attacks on civilians. I say to the Israeli leadership that military arrogance and the killing of innocent civilians will not bring about security, either for you or for us; rather, it will have catastrophic consequences. Did the planners of this war give any thought to the angry generations of Arabs and Palestinians who are growing up witnessing these events?

We must sacrifice everything that is precious and dear to us to help our brothers in Gaza. This is not a gift from us, but our debt to them, an obligation to all those who have sacrificed their lives. For such assistance to achieve the desired end, we must all cooperate to ensure that it goes directly to our people in the Strip in order to strengthen their resolve and resistance and boost their morale.

It should also be made clear that any political action should not be interpreted as rewarding aggression or allowing the aggressor to reap political gains from his crimes. Therefore, any ceasefire must provide for the lifting of the blockade and the opening of all border crossings. Anyone who merely calls for a mutual ceasefire is equating the criminal and victim, and justifying the aggression and the blockade.

We in Qatar have called for an emergency Arab summit to formulate a stance on the aggression against Gaza. Activity in the Arab streets and among many of the global forces for peace has shown that that is the least that is expected from us. We continue to believe that it is within our power to do something and that the issue is not the summit per se, but the will that we bring to the summit. If we can muster sufficient will, we will be able to take decisions that will have an impact on both the international community and Israel.

Some brothers have tried to go to the Security Council before holding a summit. But we have again seen that if we lack sufficient will, the international community will not listen to us. Before the international community listens to us, we must listen to our own Arab Nation.

We therefore renew our call for an emergency Arab summit. I leave that choice to the Arab leadership.